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ABSTRACT

Interviews with high school students have found the cause of much of the present apathy and rebellion to be the students' exclusion from decisionmaking in the daily operation of the school and classroom. Objections were also raised to the failure to enforce rules in a fair and consistent manner. Many of the "problems" such as racial conflict and drug misuse in the schools are often the students' last desperate response to an institution that forces them to do boring and meaningless things and in which they have no say. If future teachers are to be prevented from perpetuating today's disastrous teaching practices, college instructors of educational psychology must find new ways of including their students - who will be the future teachers - in decisions which govern their own preparation. This paper discusses two new ways of offering the educational psychology course; one at Teacher's College, Columbia University and one at San Francisco State. One format provided at least three choices: self-selected problem interest groups with an advanced graduate student; study groups working on the traditional subject matter; and independent study. The other format provided students choices of school and teachers with whom to work for one semester. Students made their own arrangements for this. (AF)

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CONVICTION, CHOICE, AND ACTION:

AN HONORABLE AND PRACTICAL EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

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One of John Lennon's most recent lyrics expresses the deep discontent of young people over their social exploitation. He calls it "Working Class Hero," and, with the omission of the refrain and with an occasional allipsis befitting the dignity of this setting, here are the words:

As soon as you're born they make you feel small
By giving you no time instead of it all
Till the pain is so big you feel nothing at all
A working class here is something to be

They hurt you at home and they hit you at school
They hate you if you're clever and they despise a fool
Till you're so . . . crazy you can't follow their roles

When they've tortured and scared you for 20 odd years
Then they expect you to pick a career
When you can't really function you're so full of fear

Keep you doped with religion and sex and TV
and you think you're so clever and classless and free
But you're still. . . peasants as far as I can see

There's room at the top they are telling you still
But first you must learn how to smile as you kill
If you want to be like the folks on the hill
A working class hero is something to be

Three years ago, I heard neither rock music nor certainly rock lyrics. Since then much has happened to all of us. The most significant

event for me was a study Professor Arlene Richards and I made of the level of civic satisfaction of high school students during the period 1968 to 1970, while we were at Columbia University. We asked about 7,000 high school students to describe incidents which would reveal how democratically their schools treated them.** We told them that the incidents should be democratic "dilemmas." We defined dilemmas as those conflicts in which the persons involved had difficulty in determining the "democratic thing to do" and for which there seemed to be at least two alternative resolutions. Here is an incident one student described for us:

> I think this school is undemocratic. The principal is very afraid of the kids who act tough. One day a group of Negro kids were up on the top of the stairs and were throwing bottles at any kids they didn't like. It was very dangerous because, if the glass hit anyone, he might have been seriously injured. No one was around to stop them and they must have broken nine bottles. But if any white kid is caught even

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The results of this study are described in J. De Cecco, A. Richards, et al., Civic Education for the Seventies: An Alternative to Repression and Revolution (Volume I). New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1970. Some mimeo copies can be obtained from the senior author. Microfiche and paper copies can be obtained by writing to ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Science Education, 970 Aurora Avenue, Boulder, Colorado 80302. The Research was sponsored by a USOE grant: Project No. 8-0457. Grant No. OEG-0-8080457-3737 (085). Some of the reports and incidents are included in The Regeneration of the School, ed. J. De Cecco (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), to be released in November. Prof. Richards and I are working on a popular version of the report: The Adult Establishment, Adolescent Discontent, and the Rebirth of the School (New York: Harper and Row, 1972.

lighting a match near the stairs, he is suspended. It happened to a friend. The principal is afraid of a few Negroes and they know it and they take advantage. There was a fight the other day between two Negro girls and they weren't suspended, just warned. I bet if they were white they would have been. I feel they should get someone who isn't afraid, yet will understand today's kids and make them understand the rules of the school. I'm not against Negroes. Some of my best friends are black. I just think the kids who are causing the trouble should be expelled--black or white.

The incident illustrates the major conclusion of our study: the students' chief objection to the high school was in the way the school was run and with the traditional disregard of their individual rights, that is, with moral and administrative authority exercised for them, not by them, and in ways wrecklessly inconsistent with our own and their own constitutional and moral ideals. The school desperately failed to practice the democratic ethic it formally taught.

I know that this is not the popular interpretation of what journalists and social science surveys are calling "student unrest." They would find the cause of this incident in "racial conflict" and thereby lay the blame at the door of society rather than the school. But examine carefully what this student told us. He is not demanding that white students get better treatment than black students. He is certainly not demanding that there be no rules. He is asking the principal to enforce the rules the principal made to protect the safety of all students in the school halls. His criticism focuses on the

action and inaction of the principal not on race. The student's criticism would prevail whether the culprits were black or white. But you can be damn certain that the principal, some glamorous survey, and the newspapers will describe any resulting conflict between these white and black students as racial conflict. Since none of us can change his race the school officials in this way absolve themselves from any responsibility for changing the governance of the school.

We are now doing with the "drug problem" what we have been doing with "racial conflict". It becomes increasingly clear that the widespread use of drugs in junior and senior high schools is the students' last desperate response to a school (as part of a society) which forces him to do meaningless, boring, and hateful things. By calling it a "drug problem" we can put the responsibility for its solution outside the schools. The chief "pushers" in many California schools, however, have become the school nurses who are authorized by parents and doctors to give barbituates to children who are "troublesome". Masters intent on ruling slaves cannot allow the slaves the luxury of feelings--especially outrage and protest.

Young people often have more reverence and higher expectations for the school than for other institutions. The school is the instrument of their enlightenment, the place where they learn about the nature of society and develop the talents which enable them to contribute to and change it. Their feelings about the school are both a source of excitement and frustration for their teachers and administrators. John Lennon's bitter condemnation of the school derives

in part from expectations for a more humane and democratic institution. His bitterness, as well as the profound apathy and hostility we found in high school students, is directed against an institution which demands the surrender of liberty and satisfaction as the price students must pay for social certification and advancement.

Somehow more and more young people are entertaining the very real possibility of building a society in which the work we do is both personally satisfying and socially useful. Machines can do the slave labor of their grandparents, and it is not enough to work only for the extrinsic rewards of money, status, power, and material possessions. The work must also be intrinsically rewarding. We see somewhat egocentric versions of their philosophy (as in the Greening of America) because as adults we fail to cooperate with them in finding new forms of education and work which will enable them to reconcile personal and social goals. If the choice must be doing only what satisfies oneself or doing only what satisfies the establishment, Charles Reich tells us that more and more young people will ignore the establishment. But this must be the choice only if adults, particularly parents, teachers, and school officials, continue to remain indifferent to the injustices our young people suffer.

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For the student who enrolls in our courses in educational psychology and who, in a few short months and years, will be confronted by the students and the school situation I describe, what can we provide?

The traditional answer to this question has been to teach some version of the psychology of learning, either a frankly behavioristic version in the

tradition of Skinner or a somewhat more humane, mediational version in the tradition of Gagne. This latter version I used in my textbook (DeCecco, 1968) because it provided an extraordinarily convenient fit for the traditional organization of classroom instruction and structure of learning psychology. The teacher replaced the experimenter in his manipulative, controlling role, the student became the experimental subject, the passive victim or beneficiary of an array of stimulation designed to make him even more controllable and predictable than he was originally, the instructional materials easily became the independent variables the experimenter-now-teacher used to coerce and cajole the desired behavior. The instructional objectives easily become the dependent variables, the desirable outcomes, desired at least by the teacher (De Cecco, 1970.)

Nor do I believe the answer lies in a second alternative--a vaguely humanistic, psychology which engages instructors and students in rhetorical comparisons of traditional and contemporary beliefs, values, and life-styles and in romantic discussions of self-actualization, identity searches, and the development of human potential. Nor certainly does the answer lie in encounter and sensitivity training groups which drain off anger and foster abstract emotional states and play human relations games as substitutes for doing something <u>now</u> about our problem in the school and doing it cooperatively with the people we must really live and work. It is refreshing to discover that freshmen at San Francisco State are complaining about the manipulation of their encounter-group instructors as being only the soft-sell post-Free-Speech-Movement version of the more blatant manipulation and hard-sell instruction of a previous era.

The answer lies in a third alternative which does two things: (1) It respects the students' desires to develop their own talents and interests as a means of building a life of personal satisfaction as well as social usefulness and (2) it must link theory and belief with practice in every aspect of the students' preparation for teaching. We can, therefore, no longer require our teacher-candidates to perform the alienated labor of the teacher training program or of the traditional classroom. If we continue to do so we can expect that they, in turn, will require alienated labor of their students and perpetuate the cycle of apathy and rebellion now overwhelming the schools. By linking conviction, theory, and practice we will overcome the terrible schizophrenia of American education which divorces almost everything our students learn in school from the vitality and agonies of their daily experience. Although teacher-training programs have been traditionally charged with not practicing what they preach, most recently by Charles Silberman's Crisis in the Classroom, the charge is equally relevant to the historians, the sociologists, the men of humane letters, and even the scientists. There is a peculiar democracy inherent in preaching what we practice which disturbs the loftiness and serenity of the academy which prefers the exalted teaching of one thing , and the incredibly seamy practice of other things.

We have experimented with two new ways of offering the educational psychology course. At Teachers College, where the course is often required for the master's degree, the instructor assigned to the course and a number of graduate students who had completed or were about to complete their doctoral formed a panel of instructors. In the first meeting of the class, which

had about 200 students, the instructors described their areas of special interest and knowledge. Students had four classes of options. They could form a self-selected problem-study group using the services of one of the instructors. They could join a study group which covered the traditional subject matter, also using the services of an instructor. They could find still other doctoral candidates with whom they could form groups. They could pursue an independent study project under the guidance of one or more of the instructors. The overwhelmingly popular choice was the formation of self-selected problem-interest groups.

At the conclusion of the semester students presented their work in a series of symposia over a period of about three weeks. Some groups had collected data, other groups did critical analyses and synthesis of published material, one group took over the auditorium and sponsored a drug-information night, conducting a survey of the drug habits of those visiting the exhibits, the results of which were reported back to the visitors before the closing of the exhibits, another group provided demonstrations of creative alternatives to conventional teaching of the arts, a Black Studies group provided a little guerilla theatre, and so on.

At San Francisco State, where the course is the first step in the teacher training program and offered conjointly with a course in educational sociology, philosophy, and politics, we experimented with a different format. Students had the option of taking the traditional on-campus course based on my text-book or helping teachers in the schools. They all chose the second option. We arranged for them to visit several schools and teachers until they found a teacher they would enjoy helping throughout the semester. They made their arrangements with the teachers, usually giving two hours a day for three

days every week to classroom help. Two days a week they met on campus with a second instructor in a course which sometimes provided time to discuss some of the problems they were having in the school and also to consider these problems in large educational, social, philosophical, and political contexts. Whenever they invited me, I would visit their classrooms and try to do what they were doing: help students with their assignments. I also attended several of the on-campus meetings. The second instructor assigned them published materials and I gave them copies of the material I was writing in the fall. Occasionally, the students and I met with the school officials for lunch at their schools.

Both formats were informal and had none of the monolithic glamour of computerized instruction, modular systems of instruction, and the curricula of the national laboratories. I am sure what they provided in range of choice and interest was purchased at the price of efficiency. Groups, moving from one meeting place to another, got lost and caused a little anxiety when students and officials could not immediately find them. There was a hassel over grades which was finally resolved by allowing each instructor to negotiate the terms of his grades with the students in his group. One group, studying the effect of school failure on children, lost its instructor, never found another one, and failed. They even reported on the effects of their failure had on them--an experiment with a high price. At San Francisco State the students did not get the help they needed to try new things in the classroom in which they were working. Some of them were working in classrooms which allowed children very limited choices of what and how to learn. Others worked in classrooms in which there were far too many children. But all of these are very real conditions of our schools and our students need our help

and encouragement in finding constructive ways of overcoming them.

Both formats were responses to different student and institutional interests and requirements. In both cases the instructors were putting their money where their mouths were: however crude our efforts, we were seriously practicing that we were preaching and this is sometimes everything our students ask of us.